



ABOVE—Tech. Sgt. Gabriella Jaramillo, an administrative assistant with the 377th Medical Group, joined the humanitarian mission medical team in Bolivia. Welcoming her home at the airport is her son one-year-old son Daniel.



ABOVE RIGHT—Thousands of Bolivians waited for days, hoping to see a health care provider with the Air Force humanitarian mission medical team.



Med group docs bring 'miracles' to Bolivian patients

BY 2ND LT. MICHELLE ESTEP

377th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

Mention the word "deployment" and most people think of Iraq or Afghanistan. For 10 medics from the 377th Medical Group at Kirtland AFB, deployment means their recently completed humanitarian mission to Bolivia.

The medical team included military members from Kirtland AFB, Columbus AFB, Miss., and Barksdale AFB, La., specializing in family practice, pediatrics, dentistry, optometry, clinical nursing, pharmacy and language interpretation. Team members ranged in rank from airman first class to colonel.

The medical team that included TEAM KIRTLAND members provided primary medical, dental and eye care for the people in the El Alto region on the outskirts of La Paz, Bolivia.

Col. Karen Mathews, 377th Medical Group deputy commander, was the officer in charge of the trip. "I learned so much from a cultural, social and medical standpoint about the Bolivian people we served," she said. "The experience taught me to value my own medical resources as well as what was available locally in Bolivia to compliment our medical management."

The team of volunteers saw nearly 6,000 patients during a 10-day period, including 2,165 family medicine, 1,049 pediatric and 29 surgical visits. Dentists saw 764 patients and optometrists saw 1,072 people and prescribed 1,031 pairs of glasses.

"I was amazed with the humility and hope that the Bolivian people had," said Capt. Casey Andrus, an optometrist from Columbus AFB. "Some people wept with gratitude after they put on eyeglasses that allowed them to see for the first time in years, maybe their whole life."

In hopes of minor miracles such as these, thousands of people waited for days to be seen by the Air Force doctors including Capt. Aaron Engels, a dentist from Kirtland AFB. "I think we all learned a lot on this mission. What stands out most for me was how gracious and overly thankful all of the patients were, I feel we really made a difference in their lives."



ABOVE—Members of the Air Force humanitarian medical mission tour the Tiwanaku ruins, Bolivia. **BELOW LEFT**—Maj. Sandra Volden, Family Practice, treats a Bolivian patient.

BELOW RIGHT—Col. Karen Mathews, 377th Medical Group deputy commander and leader of the medical mission team, excises a facial skin lesion.

BOTTOM LEFT—Maj. Joe Simon, Family Practice, working with a Bolivian interpreter, discusses a patient's health concerns.

BOTTOM RIGHT—Maj. Sandra Volden comforts a four-legged visitor to the team's clinic at El Alto, Bolivia.



Capt. Terrence McAllister, a pediatrician with the 377th Medical Group, helped educate patients visiting the Air Force medical team providing care to Bolivians.

